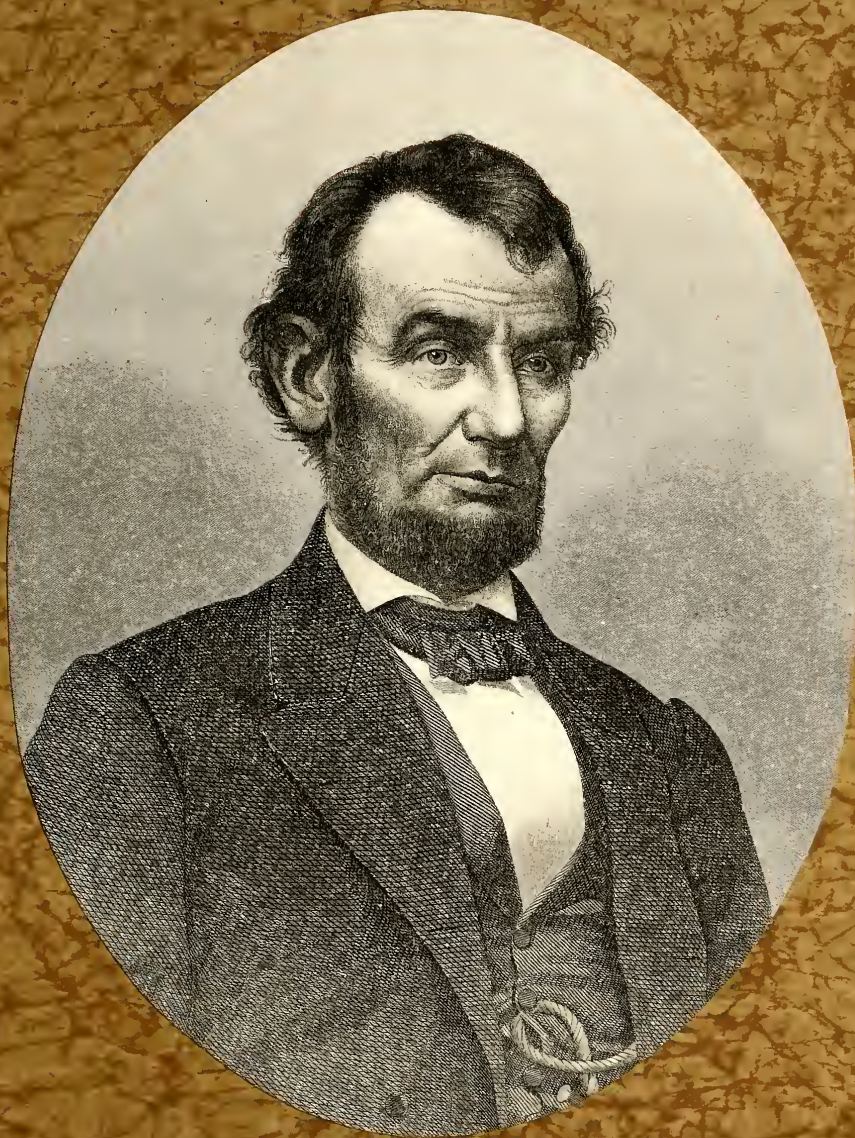


Abraham Lincoln



In presenting to the public a facsimile of Abraham Lincoln's Autobiography, it is due to the memory of that great man, that a brief statement be made of the circumstances under which it was written. In the Autumn of 1858 during the celebrated discussion between Senator Douglas and Mr. Lincoln, I had occasion to travel in the Middle and Eastern States, and finding there a laudable curiosity to learn something more of the latter than was then generally known, and looking too, to the possibilities of his becoming an available candidate for the Presidency in 1860, I applied to him for a brief history of his early life.

After repeated efforts on my part, in December 1859, he placed in my hands a manuscript, of which the following is a copy in facsimile, written with that freedom and unreserve which one friend would exercise in talking to another, and in which his peculiar conversational style is so happily set forth.

I need scarcely add that this simple unadorned statement of his was not intended for publication, but merely to give a few facts relating to his early history.

Normal, Illinois,
March 20th, 1872.

Jesse W. Fell.

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Jesse W. Fell. in the Office of the Librarian of Congress at Washington.

*Extract from a Speech of Mr. Lincoln's
delivered at Springfield June, 16th, 1858.*

*"A house divided against itself cannot
stand." I believe this Government cannot en-
dure permanently half slave and half free.
I do not expect the Union to be dissolved -
I do not expect the house to fall - but I do
expect it will cease to be divided. It will
become all one thing or all the other."*

I was born Feb. 12, 1809, in Hardin County, Kentucky. My parents were both born in Virginia, of undistinguished families, perhaps I should say Quaker families. My mother, who died in my ~~ninth~~ ^{second} year, was of a family of the name of Banks, some of whom now reside in Adams, and others in Mason Counties, Illinois. My paternal grandfather, Abraham Lincoln, emigrated from Rockingham County, Virginia, to Kentucky, about 1781 or 2, where, a year or two later, he was killed by Indians, not in battle, but by stealth, when he was laboring to open a farm in the forest. His ancestor, who was Quaker, went to Virginia from Berks County, Pennsylvania. An effort to identify them with the New England family, even as is nothing more definite, than a similarity of Christian names in both families, such as Enock, Levi, Mordecai, Solomon, Abraham, and the like.

My father, at the death of his father, was but nine years of age; and he grew up, literally without education. He removed from Kentucky to what is now Spencer County, Indiana, in my eighth year. We reached our new home about the time the State came into the Union. It was a wild region, with many bears and other wild animals, still in the woods. There I grew up. There were some schools, so called, but no qualification was ever required of a teacher, beyond "Reading, writing, and ciphering." ~~Reading, writing, and arithmetic~~ ^{supposed to understand Latin} to the Rule of Three. If a struggler ^{happened to perform in}

the neighborhood, he was looked upon as a
wizzard— There was absolutely nothing to excite
ambition for education. Of course when I came of
age, I did not know much— Still somehow, I could
read, write, and cipher to the Rule of Three, but
that was all— I have not been to school since—
The little advanced I now have upon this store of educa-
tion, I have ~~been~~ picked up from time to time under
the pressure of necessity—

I was raised to farm work, which I continued
till I was twenty-two— At twenty-one I came to
Illinois, and passed the first year in Illinois
Macou County— Then I got ^{to} New Salem ^{at this time} (then
in Sangamon, now in Menard County, where I per-
maned a year as a sort of clerk in a
store— Then came the Black Hawk war,
and I was elected a Captain of Volunteers—
a success which gave me more pleasure
than any I have had since— I went the
campaign, was elected, ran for the Legislature the
same year (1832), and was beaten— the only time
I ever have been beaten by the people— The next,
and three succeeding biennial elections, I was elect-
ed to the Legislature— I was got a candidate
afterwards. During this Legislative period I had
studied law, and removed to Springfield to
make, practiced it— In 1846 I was once elected
to the lower House of Congress— Was not a can-
didate for re-election— From 1849 to 1854, lost

inclusion, practical law more assiduously than ever before. Always a whig in politics, and generally in the whig electoral tickets, making active canvasses. I was losing interest in politics, when the repeal of the Missouri Compromise aroused me again. What I have done since then is pretty well known.

If any personal description of me is thought ~~desirable~~ desirable, it may be said, I am, in height, six feet, four inches, nearly; lean in flesh, weighing, on average, one hundred and eighty pounds; dark complexion, with coarse black hair, and grey eyes. No other marks or bands recollected.

Wm. J. W. Hale.

Yours very truly
A. Lincoln



Washington, D.C. March 26. 1854

We the undersigned hereby certify that the foregoing statement is in the hand writing of Abraham Lincoln.

David Davis
Lyman Fremont
Charles Sumner

Extract from Mr Lincoln's last

Inaugural, delivered 4th March, 1865.

"Fondly, do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet if God will that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil, shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn by the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said that the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

With malice towards none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphans, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and a lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations.

PERSONAL REMINISCENCES

JOHN W. COOK

Although bitterly opposed to slavery, Jesse W. Fell had not identified himself actively with the Abolition party. Unconsciously he was waiting for the evolution of a political party that should incorporate the slavery question in some of its multifarious aspects in its platform. Time was to give him his ample opportunity. The Kansas-Nebraska Bill so solidified the anti-slavery sentiment as to make the creation of the Republican party a logical necessity. As soon as it appeared he was one of its active adherents.

And now I am going to make a claim for Mr. Fell that I have not thus far come upon. I cannot resist the conviction that there originated with him an idea that made him an historic character and thus identified him personally and potentially with tremendous events that were world wide in their consequences. I do not claim for him the far vision that might have foreseen what followed from the forces that were set in motion. Short-sighted creatures of a day, we may, nevertheless, release energies that by the natural accumulation of inertia may precipitate catastrophes that rock a world, bury old wrongs in the ruins of the castles they have built for their own preservation, and thus make possible a new day of freedom for mankind.

Here are some statements whose correctness is amply verified by Hon. Owen T. Reeves, Hon. A. E. Stevenson, and Hon. James S. Ewing.

On the twelfth day of September, 1854, Senator Stephen A. Douglas came to Bloomington to make a public address. He stopped at the old National Hotel, at the corner of Front and Main streets. Lawrence Weldon, then engaged at the practice of the law, at Clinton, came up to hear the speech and went with Mr. Ewing and Mr. Stevenson to call upon the senator. Shortly after, Mr. Lincoln, who had probably come up from Springfield for the same purpose, came in to pay his respects to the honored guest. After a brief conversation, Mr. Lincoln withdrew. Shortly after, Mr. Fell entered the room and was cordially greeted by Judge Douglas, for they were old acquaintances. The tide of conversation ran along in the usual way for a time, but Mr. Fell had an especial purpose to subserve. He therefore said to the Judge that there was much feeling over the question of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, and that many of Mr. Lincoln's friends would be greatly pleased to hear a joint discussion between himself and Mr. Lincoln on these new and vital questions that were so vitally interesting the people.

Judge Douglas seemed much annoyed and after hesitating a moment said: "No! I won't do it. I come to Chicago. I am met by an old-line Abolitionist; I come to the center of the state and am met by an Administration Democrat. I can't hold the Abolitionists responsible for what the Whigs say; I can't hold the Whigs responsible for what the Abolitionists say, and I can't hold either responsible for what the Democrats say. It looks like 'dogging' a man over the state. This is my meeting. The people came here to hear me and I want to talk to them." Mr. Fell said: "Well, Judge, perhaps you may be right; perhaps some other time it may be arranged." And so it was that Mr. Fell did not carry his point for that meeting.

Remarks of Mr Lincoln at the dedication
of the Gettysburg Cemetery, November, 1863.

Four score and seven years ago
our fathers brought forth on this Continent, a
Nation conceived in Liberty and dedicated to
the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now, we are engaged in a great civil
war, testing whether that nation, or any nation,

so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure.
We are met on a great battle field of that war.
We have come to dedicate a portion of that field,
as a final resting place for those who gave their
lives that that nation might live. It is altogether
fit and proper that we should do this.

But in a larger sense we cannot dedicate,
- we cannot consecrate - we cannot hallow this
ground. The brave men, living and dead, who
struggled here have consecrated it far above our
poor power to add or detract. The world will
little note nor long remember what we say here,
but it can never forget what they did here. It
is for us the living rather to be dedicated here
to the unfinished work which they who fought
here, have thus far so nobly advanced. It is
rather for us to be here dedicated to the great work
remaining before us - that from these honored
dead we take increased devotion to that cause
for which they gave the last full measure of
devotion. That we here highly resolve that these
dead shall not have died in vain; that this
nation, under God, shall have a new birth of
freedom, and that Government of the people,
by the people, and for the people, shall not
perish from the earth."

Story of the Lincoln Autobiography

In 1872 Jesse W. Fell gave the following statement in regard to the Lincoln autobiography:

In the fall of 1858, during the discussion between Senator Douglas and Mr. Lincoln, I had occasion to visit the Middle and Eastern States; and as the whole country was then agitated by the slavery question, and that discussion cut a prominent figure in the agitation, I was frequently applied to for information in reference to Mr. Lincoln. I felt my state pride flattered by these inquiries, and still more to find the New York Tribune, and other papers, publishing copious extracts from these discussions, taken from the Chicago press.

I did what little I could to satisfy so laudable a curiosity, not thinking, at first, that anything further would come of this discussion, in reference to Mr. Lincoln, than his election to the Senate. At length from the frequency of these inquiries, and public notices of the Illinois contest, an impression began to form, that by judicious efforts, he could be made the republican candidate for presidency in 1860.

Very soon after my return home, and after the senatorial contest had closed, one evening, as I passed on the south side of the public square of this city, I espied the tall form of Mr. Lincoln emerging from the court house door—Judge Davis' court then being in session. I stopped until he came across the street, when after the usual salutations, I asked him to go with me into my brother (K. H. Fell's) law office, then kept over what is now the Home Bank. There we sat down, and in the calm twilight of the evening, had substantially the following conversation:

FELL.—Lincoln, I have been East, as far as Boston, and up into New Hampshire, traveling in all the New England States, save Maine; in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan and Indiana; and everywhere I hear you talked about. Very frequently I have been asked "who is this man Lincoln, of your State, now canvassing in opposition to Senator Douglas?" Being, as you know, an ardent Republican, and your friend, I usually told them, we had in Illinois, two giants instead of one; that Douglas was the little one, as they all knew, but that you were the big one, which they didn't all know.

But, seriously, Lincoln, Judge Douglas being so widely known, you are getting a national reputation through him, as the result of the late discussion; your speeches in whole or in part, on both sides, have been pretty extensively published in the East; you are there regarded, by discriminating minds, as quite a match for him in debate, and the truth is, I have a decided impression, that if your popular history and efforts on the slavery question can be sufficiently brought before the people, you can be made a formidable, if not a successful, candidate for the Presidency.

LINCOLN.—Oh, Fell, what's the use talking of me for the Presidency, whilst we have such men as Seward, Chase, and others, who are so much better known to the people, and whose names are so intimately associated with the principles of the Republican party. Everybody knows them. Nobody, scarcely, outside of Illinois, knows me. Beside, is it not, as a matter of justice, due to such men, who have carried this movement forward to its present status, in spite of fearful opposition, personal abuse, and hard names? I really think so.

FELL.—There is much truth in what you say. The men you allude to, occupying more prominent positions have undoubtedly rendered a larger service in the Republican cause than you have, but the truth is, they have rendered too much service to be available candidates. Placing it on the grounds of personal services, or merit if you please, I concede at once the superiority of their claims. Personal services and merit, however, when incompatible with the public good, must be laid aside. Seward and Chase have both made long records on the slavery question, and have said some very radical things, which, however, just and true in themselves, and however much these men may challenge our admiration, for their courage and devotion to unpopular truths, would seriously damage them in the contest, if nominated. We must bear in mind, Lincoln, that we are yet in a minority; we are struggling against fearful odds for supremacy; we were defeated on this same issue in 1856, and will be again in 1860, unless we get a great many new votes from what may be called the old con-

servative parties. These will be repelled by the radical utterances and votes of such men as Seward and Chase.

What the Republican party wants, to insure success in 1860, is a man of popular origin, of acknowledged ability, committed against slavery aggressions, who has no record to defend, and no radicalism of an offensive character, to repel votes from parties hitherto adverse. Your discussion with Douglas has demonstrated your ability, and your devotion to freedom; you have no embarrassing record; you have sprung from the humble walks of life, sharing in its toils and trials; and if we can only get these facts sufficiently before the people, depend upon it, there is some chance for you. And now, Mr. Lincoln, I come to the business part of this interview. My native State, Pennsylvania, will have a large number of votes to cast for somebody on the question we have been discussing. Pennsylvania don't like, overmuch, New York and her politicians; she has a candidate, Cameron, of her own, but he will not be acceptable to a larger number of her own people, much less abroad, and will be dropped. Through an eminent jurist and essayist of my native county in Pennsylvania, favorably known throughout the State, I want to get up a well-considered, well-fritten newspaper article, telling the people who you are, and what you have done, that it may be circulated not only in that State, but elsewhere, and thus help in manufacturing sentiment in your favor.

I know your public life and can furnish items that your modesty would forbid, but I don't know much about your private history; when you were born, and where, the names and origin of your parents, what you did in early life, what your opportunities for education, etc., and I want you to give me these. Won't you do it?

LINCOLN.—Fell, I admit the force of much that you say, and admit that I am ambitious, and would like to be President; I am not insensible to the compliment you pay me, and the interest you manifest in the matter, but there is no such good luck in store for me, as the Presidency of these United States; besides, there is nothing in my early history that would interest you or anybody else; and as Judge Davis says, "It won't pay." Good-night.

And thus ended, for the time being, my pet scheme of helping to make Lincoln President. I notified him, however, as his giant form, wrapped in a dilapidated shawl, disappeared in the darkness, that this was not the last of it; that the facts must come.

The next year, 1859, I was engaged much of the time, as the corresponding secretary of the Republican State Central Committee, in traveling over the State, and in carrying out plans for a more thorough organization of the Republican party, preparatory to the great contest of 1860. I visited personally a large majority of the counties in the State, and nearly everywhere had the satisfaction of learning, that, though many doubted the possibility of nominating Lincoln, most generally it was approved of. This fact became in time very apparent to Lincoln himself, whom I not infrequently met in my travels, and in the month of December of that year, feeling that perhaps it would "pay," I induced him to place in my hands this eminently characteristic paper. I made some additions to the facts, therein contained, bearing upon his political history, and immediately forwarded them to the Hon. Joseph J. Lewis, of Westchester, Pennsylvania, since Commissioner of Internal Revenue.

These constituted the basis on which that gentleman wrote a biographical sketch and notice of his public services, altogether the most complete and reliable, that ever appeared prior to his nomination. It had a wide circulation, not only in Pennsylvania, but in Illinois and throughout the country. As an evidence of its superior merit, this same gentleman, who was one of the leading delegates at Chicago from Pennsylvania, remarked to me, the morning after the nomination, that the Chicago press had complimented him very handsomely, by reproducing his article almost entire, in response to the inquiry, then became general, "Who is Abraham Lincoln?"

Such, my dear sir, is the history of a paper that has already become historic, and which to me, at least, has a value I little dreamed of at the time. As an evidence of that fact, instead of sending to Judge Lewis a copy, I sent him the original paper, and it was not till within the last year, that in order to induce corrections in Lamon's *Life of Lincoln*, then in process of publication, I caused it to be returned to me.

Yours truly,

JESSE W. FELL.

Bloomington, Illinois, March, 1872.

